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ABSTRACT

What does it mean to be a "good" school district? What are the actions needed to establish a culture of continuous and long-term improvement? This document was written for school and district leaders interested in exploring how to frame and understand accountability for quality. It explores what it really means for a school district to hold itself accountable at all levels. Chapter 1 summarizes the unintended consequences that result from accreditation and accountability policies that put too much pressure on schools to raise test scores. The second chapter tells the story of one school district--Elizabeth City-Pasquotank School District in North Carolina--that developed accountability strategies around the belief that encouraging good school-based thinking about quality teaching and learning practices would lead to good test results. The district strategies evolved over 4 years to include: (1) developing a new set of "process" indicators; (2) district leaders visiting and talking with school faculty; (3) training teachers in classroom assessment; (4) supporting the development of school-based authentic assessment approaches; (5) developing promotion/intervention policies that clarify expectations for student progress and demand accountability from students and parents as well as schools; and (6) involving school administrators and all teachers in the development of agreed-upon standards for "good" teaching in the basics. Chapter 3 discusses how the strategies encouraged accountability at several levels. Appendices include the district's proposed districtwide indicators, a support staff feedback-survey, components of the grades 1-6 communication-skills program, an evaluation rubric for senior project presentations, and the K-8 promotion-intervention policy. (Contains 33 references.) (LMI)

Using Accountability as a Lever for Changing the Culture of Schools: Examining District Strategies

R&D

Using Accountability as a Lever for Changing the Culture of Schools: Examining District Strategies

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SERVE
SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education

Associated with the School of Education, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

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About the SERVE Organization

SERVE, the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education, is a consortium of educational organizations whose mission is to promote and support the continuous improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast. Formed by a coalition of business leaders, governors, policymakers, and educators seeking systemic, lasting improvement in education, the organization is governed and guided by a Board of Directors that includes the chief state school officers, governors, and legislative representatives from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Committed to creating a shared vision of the future of education in the Southeast, the consortium impacts educational change by addressing critical educational issues in the region, acting as a catalyst for positive change, and serving as a resource to individuals and groups striving for comprehensive school improvement.

SERVE's core component is a regional educational laboratory funded since 1990 by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education. Building from this core, SERVE has developed a system of programs and initiatives that provides a spectrum of resources, services, and products for responding effectively to national, regional, state, and local needs. SERVE is a dynamic force, transforming national education reform strategies into progressive policies and viable initiatives at all levels. SERVE Laboratory programs and key activities are centered around

- Applying research and development related to improving teaching, learning, and organizational management
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As a Research and Development program within SERVE, our role is to bring research to educators but more importantly, perhaps, partner with educators to share their knowledge and experience with others. In our efforts to understand accountability in a real sense—in terms of how it translates into actions at the district level—we have worked closely with the leaders of the Elizabeth City-Pasquotank school system in North Carolina. For a school superintendent and assistant superintendent to take the time to put their story to paper represents an incredible commitment of time and energy. We appreciate Dr. Joe Peel's and Dr. Mack McCary's commitment to furthering the region's understanding of what accountability might mean.

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Executive Summary

What does it mean to be a "good" school district? On one hand, districts are judged by their relative ranking on student achievement compared to other districts. On the other, it is clear that schools can adopt policies or practices that improve test scores without any concomitant improvement in instructional quality. Or, they can improve test scores at the expense of other programs that are not tested (science, art, foreign language, etc.). So test scores are not sufficient as indicators of quality. Rather than just test scores, parents consider the quality of the school program in making their judgments about school quality. When asked what influenced them the most in choosing a school for their children, in one survey (Elam, 1990), parents gave priority to quality of teaching staff, maintenance of school discipline, curriculum, and size of classes. Although stakeholders' beliefs about what constitutes "goodness" are important, ultimately it is how the district and school leaders envision quality that gets communicated to teachers and students. This document is written for school and district leaders interested in exploring how to frame and understand accountability for quality.

Chapter One introduces the commonly accepted definition of accountability as being the bottom line—student test scores. It has been shown that the manner in which results of large-scale testing programs are used—particularly in terms of policies that establish rewards and penalties—has a direct impact on teachers and schools. A brief summary of the unintended consequences that result from accreditation and accountability policies that put too much pressure on schools to raise test scores is provided.

One could conclude from such research on the use of large-scale testing results that district leaders are unlikely to improve the quality of service delivery by simply exhorting teachers to push harder and monitoring student test results more closely and more often. In the long-run, more top-down control is unlikely to make the quality of instruction better for students. On the other hand, the current trends toward decentralization and school-based management may appear to leave district leaders without a role to play. But district leaders are critical to the improvement process. Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) conclude

> *Individual schools can become highly innovative for short periods of time without the district, but they cannot stay innovative without district action to establish the conditions for continuous and long-term improvement.*

It is clear that the district leadership role is critical, but many leaders are struggling with the form this role should take. What are the actions needed to establish a culture of continuous and long-term improvement?

The second chapter tells the story of one district committed to defining accountability as continuous improvement toward the goal of transforming schools to meet the needs of the future. District leaders can ask themselves, as these leaders did, "What have we done to

encourage an accountable culture among schools in the district; are we doing enough; and what else can we do?" In this case, the district strategies evolved over four years to include

- developing a new set of "process" indicators for school leaders to use in the school improvement process;
- district leaders visiting and talking with school faculty often to ask them probing questions about their goals and progress;
- training teachers in classroom assessment so that they more clearly articulate their instructional goals, engage students in meaningful work, and better assess student progress;
- supporting the development of school-based authentic assessment approaches such as required senior research projects that go beyond state test requirements;
- developing promotion/intervention policies that clarify expectations for student progress and demand accountability from students and parents as well as schools; and
- involving school administrators and all teachers in the development of agreed-upon standards for "good" teaching in the basics such as communication skills and mathematics.

The strategies above are embedded in the district's chronological report of their progress (Chapter Two). In Chapter Three, the strategies that emerge from the chronological report are categorized as encouraging accountability at several levels. Some strategies encouraged a commitment to quality and self-reflection at the school level as part of the school improvement process. Some strategies encouraged professional growth and a consideration of professional standards of practice at the teacher level. Finally, some encouraged student ownership and responsibility for learning and growth. Strategies at all levels are important if accountability is to become an internally directed process rather than only an externally-imposed, reward and punishment process.

CHAPTER ONE

An Expanded Definition of Accountability

The purpose of this document is to explore what it really means for a school district to hold itself accountable at all levels. Our focus is the district role in establishing an accountable culture. This document tells the story of one district that developed accountability strategies around the belief that encouraging good school-based thinking about quality teaching and learning practices would lead to good test results. This is a story worth telling for the support it may offer to other districts interested in striving for quality services and a culture that supports individual growth, rather than fixating on raising test scores.

A second reason for examining district strategies is that, in an age of school-based management, many district leaders are struggling with new roles. Much of the energy around school reform today focuses at the school level. School systems are encouraged to push more decision-making authority to the school site, empowering principals and teachers to shape their own schools. The focus on the school may appear to leave the district leaders without much of a role to play in school improvement, but to draw such a conclusion would be a mistake. What becomes clear in the next chapter is that district leaders play a critical role in the school improvement process. They provide the vision, direction, feedback, and capacity building that is the foundation upon which successful school cultures are built.

Accountability as the Bottom Line—Student Test Scores

Too often in education, accountability is thought of as only reporting on the bottom line—student achievement. Measuring and reporting on student achievement is a critical component of evaluating educational effectiveness. Koretz notes

> *A common thread runs through many recent proposals for the reform of American education: the notion of using students' performance on achievement tests as a basis for holding educators, schools, and school systems accountable. Indeed, in many reforms, test-based accountability is viewed as the principal tool for improving educational practice (Koretz, 1996, pg. 171).*

Can test-based accountability improve education? Can improvements be realized through rewards and penalties attached to test scores?

> *Prevailing approaches that focus heavily on standardized test results are unlikely to solve what is wrong unless we begin to think about accountability more broadly.*

> *Alternative approaches to educational accountability need to be explored in order to return to a broader sense of what it means to be accountable, and to lessen the negative aspects of outcome accountability (Haney & Raczek, 1994).*

The test-based definition of accountability is usually a top-down approach. The top-down version of accountability typically involves a higher level of an organization (the state or district) holding the lower level (districts/ schools) responsible for student results of some kind (test scores). States sometimes use test results to provide monetary rewards to schools for meeting target standards or goals. If expectations for student results are not met, some sanctions typically result.

State testing programs can have positive consequences associated with the articulation of desired outcomes. That is, curriculum frameworks and testing programs help districts focus on teaching toward desired student outcomes. In an investigation of the impacts of a statewide performance-based assessment program (the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program) on literacy instruction, researchers (Almasi et al, 1994) were able to identify some schools that demonstrated major impacts. In particular, the instructional tasks, methods, and learning environments were altered by teachers and administrators to reflect the nature of the assessment and the state-mandated outcomes for literacy.

It is how large-scale testing results are used (rewards and penalties) that is often at the heart of the debate about the merits of these efforts. For example, in Kentucky, schools are held accountable for results on the state tests. New state tests have been developed which use a variety of methods (multiple-choice, open-ended questions, performance tests, and portfolios) to assess more challenging instructional objectives. Cash rewards for schools showing improvement were first awarded in 1995. Schools can be sanctioned for not making enough progress.

In a recent Rand report (1996) on the Kentucky program, based on surveys of teachers and principals, the authors concluded that the benefits of the testing program included teachers spending more time on problem-solving, writing, and communicated math (areas tested by the state). And principals agreed that the new state tests encouraged even the most resistant teachers to change their teaching methods. However, few principals and teachers expressed support for the financial incentives and sanctions. Sixty-seven percent of teachers "strongly agreed" that rewards and sanctions will unfairly reward or punish many teachers.

A review of the research suggests there can be unintended consequences of the way test results are typically used (top-down accountability). The possible consequences include the following:

- **Demoralized teachers, particularly in low-achieving schools**

  Instead of motivating low-performing schools, sanctions for low test scores can frustrate them. In a 1995 SERVE report, *Overcoming Barriers to Reform in the Southeast,* the authors concluded that after several years of implementing mandated state accountability systems,

  > *. . .it is clear that failure of low-performing systems could easily have been predicted. By and large, failure is occurring in the same systems that historically lagged behind; with few exceptions, the typical low-performing school is rural and poor and frequently has a high proportion of minority children. It should come as no surprise that raising the accountability bar has been even more challenging for school districts that had difficulty with the less*

rigorous standards. However, while the new accountability measures provide hard penalties for low-performing schools, few included provisions to help historically weak school systems meet the new standards.

The authors conclude that rather than focusing primarily on sanctions for low-performing districts, policymakers should place an equal emphasis on ways to prevent failures. Several states are moving to a more technical assistance role relative to these low-performing districts, realizing that these districts need more resources and assistance (e.g., better facilities, reductions in class size, long-term professional growth opportunities for teachers)—not more penalties and embarrassment.

- Narrowed curriculum and a focus on objectives that can be tested with paper-and-pencil tests

Researchers have described the impact of high-stakes accountability programs as a narrowing of the curriculum such that some teachers feel forced to "teach to the test" and underrepresent other important educational outcomes in their curriculum. In a qualitative study of elementary schools, Smith (1991) found that teachers began to neglect science, social studies, and writing instruction to teach test-taking skills related to reading and math (the areas tested by the state). Smith also concluded that, over time, high stakes norm-referenced tests at the elementary level led to the increased use of teaching methods that were more test-like (such as the use of worksheets) and decreased use of hands-on instruction.

- Diminished sense of professionalism among teachers

Smith and Rottenberg (1991) reported that overemphasis on test results diminished teachers' sense of themselves as autonomous professionals and authorities on curriculum and instruction. Teachers often come to perceive their role as covering the content in preparation for tests, rather than motivating and engaging students with interesting work. Hatch and Freeman (1988) reported that teachers felt conflict between what they believed to be good teaching and the instructional methods they felt forced to adopt to raise test scores.

- Unethical placement practices that artificially boost scores

For schools who feel pressure to raise test scores but are unclear about how to accomplish this result, unethical practices may be adopted. Mehrens and Kaminski (1989) concluded that unethical practices such as developing a curriculum based on test content, presenting items similar to those that will be on the test, and dismissing some low-achieving students on test day can boost test scores with no significant change in the quality of the instructional program or student learning.

Even more serious is that some low-achieving schools feel pressured to develop placement practices (high grade retention rates, use of developmental and pre-first grade transition programs, placement in special education programs) that artificially boost test scores. McGill-Franzen and Allington (1993) were principal investigators on a number of research projects on the effects of state-mandated testing initiatives on the school experiences of low-achieving children. They describe one school that received numerous awards based on high scores on a third grade assessment. The high scores were due primarily to the school's high grade retention rate (nearly 50% across the K-2 years). Another school with the same population—but which retained only 5% of its K-2 students and which reliably reduced the proportion of children whose

scores fell in the lowest quartile across the elementary grades—did not score as well on the third grade assessment and did not receive awards.

In discussing the increased numbers of students who are labeled as mildly handicapped and placed in learning disability special education classes where children are believed to be disabled by a permanent handicap, McGill-Franzen and Allington (1993) conclude

> *We found evidence, albeit typically indirect, that some decisions to classify children as handicapped were motivated by a desire to remove low-achieving students from the high-stakes assessment stream (and, ultimately, the public accountability reports).... Since these students typically exhibit low achievement, removing them from the assessment stream contaminates reported results.... In our work we have found that from 5% to 25% of the students within particular schools are identified as handicapped by the end of Grade 2, and in one district about 15% of the children had been identified as handicapped before entry into kindergarten.... We found evidence that referrals to special education are occurring earlier now than a decade ago and are concentrated in grades K-2, again before statewide competency testing, which occurs in Grade 3 in the districts we studied (McGill-Franzen and Allington, 1993, pg. 21).*

- Decreased participation rates in higher-level academic courses

Raising student achievement in higher-level math and science courses at the high school may be incompatible with the goal of increasing participation in these courses, which is a goal of Tech Prep and other School-to-Work reform efforts. If school staff believe score averages are what count, they may infer that participation levels do not count and reinforce students' tendencies to take easier courses.

Koretz (1996) summarizes what we know about the impact of test-based accountability systems:

> *At first, the logic seems simple and compelling: student achievement is the primary goal of education, and holding educators accountable for the amount of learning they induce can only focus and intensify efforts. In practice, however, assessment-based accountability poses serious difficulties. Despite the long history of assessment-based accountability, hard evidence about its effects is surprisingly sparse, and the little evidence that is available is not encouraging. There is evidence that effects are diverse, vary from one type of testing program to another, and may be both positive and negative. The large positive effects assumed by advocates, however, are often not substantiated by hard evidence; and closer scrutiny has shown that test-based accountability can generate spurious gains—thus creating illusory accountability, distorting program effectiveness, and degrading instruction (pg. 172).*

Koretz suggests that designing an effective accountability-oriented testing program, whether at the district or state level, is complex. Because of this, it is critical that such accountability systems be the subject of ongoing monitoring and impact studies. For example, a study of the impact of the Alabama state writing test program (McLean, 1996) concluded that teachers surveyed are in considerable agreement that the state-mandated writing assessment has positively influenced the teaching of writing and that the emphasis on writing would diminish if the writing assessment program was eliminated. The study also found that in lower-achieving schools, the teachers did not appear to have the level of skill necessary to develop a cohesive

writing curriculum using the assessment results and suggested that these schools need assistance to improve the writing scores (not more penalties).

Although assessment-based accountability is not the subject of this document, it is how accountability has typically been defined and thus sets the stage for the expanded definition of accountability that follows.

What is Locally-Owned Accountability?

In contrast to a "high-stakes," test-based accountability system, a bottom-up approach to accountability involves the mechanisms through which educators hold themselves responsible for working toward educational goals. The bottom-up approach to accountability or site-based accountability involves developing a culture that encourages school faculty to examine practices, represents a commitment to using research and gathering data to inform decisions and provides time for reflection and collegial problem-solving.

Consider the following quotes:

> *Accountability as a charge will fail unless we push the meaning of the word out to include the only kind of accountability that has ever worked long and well for a free people, and that is accountability by inner commitment, by a self-directed sense of responsibility. No doubt there needs to be external observers and evaluators, but without emphasis in education upon the internal commitment of each of us doing our best, to being effective, honest and responsible, no amount of outside policing will suffice to bring about lasting improvement (Rinehart, 1973, pg. 51).*

> *In short, without school professionals coming to understand and value accountability efforts as a legitimate dimension of their work, such external policy initiatives seem likely to be frustrated over and over (Bryk & Hermanson, 1993, pg. 464).*

The National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching (NCREST) at Teachers College, Columbia University, has produced several publications examining the meaning of accountability at the local level. Darling-Hammond and Ascher (1991) suggest that an accountability system consists of commitments, policies, and practices that

- Increase the likelihood that students will receive good instruction and learn in a supportive, challenging environment
- Reduce the probability that harmful policies or practices will be used
- Provide for self-evaluation to identify, diagnose, and change courses of actions that are harmful or ineffective

In *Creating Learner Centered Accountability,* Darling-Hammond et al (1993) describe accountability at the local level broadly:

> *Accountability encompasses how a school or school system hires, evaluates, and supports its staff, how it relates to students and parents, how it manages its daily affairs, how it makes decisions; how it ensures that the best available knowledge will be acquired and used; how it generates new knowledge, how it evaluates its own functioning as well as student progress, how it tackles problems, and how it provides incentives for continual improvement (pg. 4).*

Thus, accountability is everything a school or school system does to ensure continual improvement and quality. This definition of accountability is consistent with the Total

Quality Management approach. A major tenet of Total Quality Management is the importance of focusing on the continual improvement of the system rather than worrying about the bottom line (see SERVE report, *Total Quality Management: Passing Fad or "the Real Thing"?*).

In the next chapter, leaders of the Elizabeth City-Pasquotank School District reflect on their strategies to ensure quality. In this small, rural eastern North Carolina community with ten schools and 6,200 students, a new superintendent and assistant superintendent began a restructuring process in 1992. Their goals involved making changes in teaching, assessment, and leadership in a low-wealth district where in 1992 the achievement levels were significantly below the state average and not improving, where half of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch, and where the district received low-wealth funding as the 25th-poorest district in a state with 119 districts.

Is their restructuring process working? Some indicators of their success are listed below.

- The district received the Governor's Most Outstanding Entrepreneurial Schools Award for 1995.
- The district superintendent was named the 1996 North Carolina Superintendent of the Year by the North Carolina School Boards Association.
- J.C. Sawyer Elementary won recognition as one of 11 North Carolina Schools of Excellence for innovative uses of assessment (portfolio, student-led conferences).

Nine of the ten district schools (90%) realized 110% of an average year's growth in student achievement on state tests. (Only 40% of all schools participating in this pilot of a new state accountability system reached the 110% exemplary growth standard.)

In 1992, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction had a state-mandated accountability system that required district and school-improvement plans be built around a set of student outcome indicators. These indicators were primarily state-mandated tests. The Elizabeth City-Pasquotank district leadership felt a need to have the indicators for accountability reflect their vision for the district, thus starting the process of defining what accountability means at the local level.

Keep in mind, as you read their story, some of the facilitating factors that emerge:

- Strong and committed central office leadership with clear goals
- School board support for change
- Participative decision-making at the district level
- Reallocation of district resources to the school level
- Small number of schools (10) in the district that permits personal relationships between schools and central office
- Site-based school improvement planning based on using data and research
- Ongoing professional development efforts in instruction and assessment
- A commitment to honest reflection
- A commitment to listening well
- A commitment to learning from mistakes

CHAPTER TWO

How One School District Built a Culture of Quality and Self-Assessment

By Dr. Mack McCary (Assistant Superintendent) and Dr. Joe Peel (Superintendent)

When the Elizabeth City-Pasquotank Public Schools began its four-year school reform effort described in this paper, the North Carolina state accountability plan focused only on student achievement as measured by standardized tests. Like many poor districts, we faced the dilemma of how to begin making long-term, lasting improvements to a system which historically had large numbers of students who had never been academically successful. Our prior experience in school reform convinced us that we would not help these low-performing students simply by passing on to school leaders the exhortation to increase scores and otherwise conduct business as usual. More testing and monitoring of the schools by the district was also not the answer.

In our initial planning and strategizing four years ago, as the new administration, we drew heavily from the experience of corporations that, facing increasing foreign competition, had to decide how to get their workers to concentrate on producing quality. They made this transition not through obsession with the bottom line of profits (in our case, test scores), but through engaging their people in working cooperatively to focus on the heart of the business—producing quality that would delight the customer. We decided to try to engage our people in totally rethinking the way schools need to do business, especially the relationships (teacher and student, teacher and teacher, teachers and administrators, etc.) and to focus our efforts on encouraging our schools to produce quality school work for our students.

One way for us to begin to articulate our belief that process—the educational delivery system—was the heart of the matter was to add indicators of the quality of the educational program to the required state indicators. We wanted to add additional indicators that reflected our goals and values. For example, if a district values participatory decision-making, then it is in that district's best interest to measure progress toward that end.

The District Role in Facilitating School Improvement: Developing Meaningful Indicators

Prior to our leadership, school improvement teams had been responsible for developing, implementing, and evaluating school improvement plans for two years. These teams had set goals almost exclusively related to improving test scores. We hoped to expand their thinking and give them some alternatives that might have more of an impact on the quality of teaching and learning and the climate of the schools.

We thought that by developing indicators for critical "process" areas and asking the schools to incorporate these indicators into school improvement plans, we would make the information important enough to collect and use. More importantly, the indicators would serve to clearly focus our school and district improvement efforts on more than just the end results, i.e., improved student achievement. We wanted to focus equal attention on the best ways to get to those results through re-thinking and changing the way schools operate. At the same time, we wanted to begin a process of re-thinking student outcome measures as a district, outcome measures that would fit our local needs and go beyond on-demand state tests.

We developed 42 new local indicators in addition to the 41 measures of achievement, dropouts, and attendance required by the state. The proposed indicators were presented to a district-wide committee of 21 principals, faculty, county office administrators, and community members. The committee met several times during the winter of 1992-93 to review, refine, and add to the indicators proposed as well as to clarify how the indicators would be measured. A final version of the indicators was provided to schools to aid them in developing their school improvement plans due in spring, 1993. Not all the indicators were intended to be used in the first year. Some were ready to go in the first year, and others needed more development and were to be phased in the second or third year. For example, the expanded student achievement outcome indicators were to be developed and implemented in 1995-96.

Developing and working with our schools in the use of these indicators was our first attempt at an expanded, locally-owned accountability system. Below is a discussion of the reasons for each category of indicators developed. Actual indicators are italicized. The list of indicators proposed for reporting to the state are included as Appendix A.

These new indicators were broadly grouped into the following six categories:

1. Expanded student achievement/outcomes: The indicators in this category monitor the success of our students as they move through elementary, middle, and high school on the way to graduating into "the real world." If 85% of the jobs in the 21st century will require post-secondary technical and/or professional training, then the mission of schools must focus on ensuring every high school graduate is ready for the future workplace and citizenship. These student achievement indicators were designed to help us monitor whether we were successfully educating everyone toward standards that are higher and different from those traditionally required for high school graduation or even for college admission.

   The *cohort dropout rate* reflected the percentage of 9th graders who graduated from high school four years later. In contrast to the watered-down rate used by state and federal governments, this rate would tell us whether we were having any impact on the

25-30% of students we lose before graduation. The *retention rate* and *course failure rates* monitor whether new and expanded learning opportunities are indeed helping more students successfully meet higher expectations. The *percent of graduates completing higher-level math and science courses* tells us whether we are preparing a higher percentage of our graduates for an increasingly technical workplace.

Perhaps the most difficult and important indicators we proposed were *entrance requirements* for the next level of schooling: what should students know and be able to do to enter upper elementary, middle, and high school? That is, we wanted to have some checkpoints at which time we could assess students' performance relative to the next level of schooling. Our high school teachers would have no hope of moving all graduates to higher standards without a carefully coordinated effort throughout the entire K-12 continuum. We proposed entrance requirements (to be assessed at grades 3, 6, and 8) as a way to engage teachers, parents, and students throughout the district in determining what students most needed to know and be able to do to be successful at the next level of schooling.

Our work in this area began with participation in a statewide Outcome-Based Education pilot that involved the community in identifying broad goals such as students as self-directed learners and problem-solvers. We found that it was extremely difficult to move toward operationalizing these broad goals into standards for student achievement. As part of a subsequent state pilot program to look at developing new assessments around new state standards, we realized that the outcomes we had developed with the community were actually broad goals that helped frame discussions about the future for which we were preparing students. The outcomes, however, were not appropriate for measurement.

Once on track with more measurable standards from the state pilot program, we spent two years developing the first draft of our expectations for how students should perform and discussing the measures to be used in promoting students to the next level of schooling. Much of this work was accomplished by district-wide committees. This work culminated in the winter of 1996 with a promotion/intervention policy that provides for the assessment of students at grades 3, 6, and 8.

2. **Community Involvement:** A key component of the changes we wanted to see in this area was a greater incorporation of "real-life" problems and experiences into school work. We set two indicators to monitor whether opportunities to engage in "real world" applications were increasing for our students—the extent of their participation in *community service projects* and in *apprenticeships*. Thirdly, we hoped schools would work toward increased *involvement of parent and community volunteers* in the schools.

3. **Parent Involvement:** One of the most robust findings of educational research is the positive effect that parent involvement has on student achievement. This set of indicators was proposed to help schools hold themselves accountable for creating a climate that would invite parent involvement. The number of *books read* at home is correlated with reading achievement and therefore was an important indicator for schools to monitor. We also wanted schools to assess the extent to which parents felt they knew what was going on in schools—specifically, the extent of parents' knowledge of the goals or *outcomes* for the *courses* their children were taking, and of the *progress* their children were making. Finally, by asking schools to monitor the number of *parent conferences and workshops*, schools could hold themselves accountable for proactively finding ways to increase parent involvement.

4. Professional development of teachers: These indicators were developed to focus everyone's attention on how crucial new adult learning is to transforming schools to meet higher standards. We asked the schools to consider monitoring the level of use of *alternative assessment* in the classroom and the use of *published course outcomes* reflecting our major emphasis on better uses of assessment to improve student achievement. Another indicator focused on the *increased use of integrated units*, reflecting our belief that an increasing amount of coursework needs to incorporate the interdisciplinary thought required by "real-world" problems. Finally, increasing *collegiality* and *teacher involvement in decision making* are essential norms for sustaining long-term commitment to improvement, and thus should be considered as measures of school effectiveness.

5. Quality work designed by teachers and worked on by students: Perhaps the most crucial assumption we made about what was needed to transform schools for the 21st century was the shift in thinking about the roles of teachers and students, especially as related to the quality of school work. Phil Schlechty has defined the essential purpose of schools as creating high-quality work for students to do. His research identified some characteristics of quality schoolwork: clearly articulated and compelling standards, protection from adverse consequences for initial failures, novelty, choice, authenticity, and substance (Vowels, 1994).

   We adopted quality work as the overriding concept guiding all our work in developing curriculum, new instructional methods, and better assessment methods. To monitor whether students are experiencing more of the features of quality work in their assignments, we developed a *student survey* that schools could administer annually to all students in grades 4 through 12. Our reason for suggesting a student survey is that as our teachers develop better ways to design quality work, our students will confirm that the school work given to them is indeed of high quality.

6. School climate: In this category, we suggested that schools address a few indicators in addition to those addressed under professional development of teachers. The number of *discipline incidents* reported in the schools would help indicate whether students had successfully made the shift to taking more responsibility for their own behavior. *Student* reports of their *involvement in decision making*, like that of businesses involving their employees in deciding how to better produce quality products and services, would also help us monitor and think about this new role for students. Finally, we thought assessing *faculty involvement in sponsoring extracurricular activities* would be a good way to focus attention on the importance of these activities to student success.

Lessons Learned

As a small district with limited resources, we underestimated how much work would be involved in communicating the need for and use of indicators, in defining and refining the way the indicators could be measured, and in having schools actually collect the data. Because of the ambitious scope of what we were proposing to the ten schools, we would characterize their first reaction as one of shock. If we had it to do over again, we would start on a smaller scale. However, the indicator package was our way of saying to schools in a concrete fashion, "Here's what we think is important in developing improvement plans that go beyond state-mandated test scores." It signaled to schools that we wanted them to think about goals that are important to us as an organization and community, not just base their goals on improving test scores.

An Evolving Definition of Accountability

We are currently in the fifth year of our work in rethinking accountability to fit our local goals and values. Internalizing accountability is a slow process and can not be rushed. Below we provide a history of how our efforts began with the identification of indicators and evolved from there.

Year One Communicating the Vision

The goal we set for ourselves in our first year as leaders was "awareness." We engaged the community and staff in discussing the future and what students would need to be successful. We wanted to create an awareness of the need for change and improvement by using the following strategies to create awareness: (1) use of the 42 new indicators described earlier through training for school improvement teams, (2) the implementation of a system for school staff to evaluate central office staff , and (3) the design and implementation of a summer training program for teachers in the areas of alternative or performance assessment.

1. Training for school improvement teams: The indicators were presented to principals in the winter of 1993 for use in the next year's school improvement process. Part of this process included a two-day training by the superintendent and assistant superintendent for school improvement teams from all ten schools. The purpose of the training was to set some expectations for how the school improvement process would work and how data should inform decisions. The teams received a manual on the proposed indicators which reinforced the need to set priorities and categorize indicators by major improvement areas.

   How did the schools respond to the use of indicators? As would be expected, their sophistication and use of indicators in the improvement process varied. The response ranged from digging in and studying what the indicators had to offer to compliance (another hoop to jump through). How well schools did in looking hard at indicators and data seemed to depend on the quality of the site-based leadership at each school. The incorporation of the indicators was substantive in those schools whose core leadership team had a commitment to the training, planning, and reflection time needed to develop a more student-centered than adult-centered culture.

   At some schools, where the norm of isolation and individual teaching versus collegiality and common goals was primary, the teams took a more superficial look at the indicators. We estimate that half of the 10 schools seriously considered the indicators in this first year. Although all administered the student work survey described above, not all processed the data in meaningful ways. We concluded that understanding and collecting data on indicators and then making sense of what is found is a significant time investment. Schools often do not have the large chunks of time needed to accomplish this. Those schools that have already established norms of looking deeply at issues and problems understand the role of indicators and see them as fitting with their priorities. Schools where teachers work mostly in isolation, coming together superficially to handle administrative issues, will at first likely see indicators as a significant burden.

   We learned several lessons that first year. We probably set too many additional indicators given the size of our district and the limited human resources we had available for developing the system for collecting and analyzing all the data. We would provide more support and assistance in helping school leaders understand and operationalize indicators. We should have spent a little more time on the front end of the process, clearly communicating what each indicator meant and how the data

were to be collected. We would recommend to a district attempting to duplicate our effort that a booklet be produced that clearly lists and explains each indicator and the grade span to which it applies and that states how the data will be collected. A district must also ensure that it has a sufficient number of properly-trained staff to implement such a process.

2. Assessment of central office staff: In order to build a district-wide team focused on continuous improvement, schools were held accountable through indicators. But schools were also able to hold central office staff, including the superintendent, accountable for the quality and quantity of service provided to their school improvement efforts. These assessments (Appendix B) were given to each central office staff person's supervisor and the superintendent's was given to the chairman of the school board. This bottom-up assessment process was a powerful tool for modeling shared accountability and fostered the realization that we all must help each other do a better job. It also greatly encouraged leadership teams at the schools and central office to practice honest and open dialogue.

3. Summer training for teachers in quality classroom assessment practices: The need for different kinds of workers in the future translates into a need to move away from a total reliance on traditional classroom testing (short-answer, multiple-choice) to a more balanced assessment approach which included the incorporation of more "real-world" tasks that require higher-order thinking and challenge students at a higher level. In our first year in the district, we embarked on a summer training program for teachers in the area of quality classroom assessment practices. We developed a two-day voluntary training program that included alternative assessment, rubrics, and grading practices. This intensive session was followed by several "reunions" during the year in which teachers worked on and shared alternative assessment projects they were designing and implementing. The training and the "reunions" were conducted by the assistant superintendent, thus making obvious the district support for teacher growth in this area.

   In the first year and a half, about one-third of the district's 325 + certified staff were trained. The use of "reunions" ensured they had the support to try out different assessment methods matched to higher-level instructional goals. They experimented with the use of portfolios, student-led conferencing, second-chance grading in high school math, and checklists and rubrics to teach quality criteria to students and help them learn to self-assess. The teachers who participated in the assessment training (currently over half the district's teachers) reported that explicitly sharing quality expectations with students before expecting them to complete a task was producing some of the highest quality work they had ever received from students.

Lessons Learned

In summarizing our first year, we felt we made significant progress in creating an awareness of the need for change, honest dialogue, and reflection on quality. We succeeded in beginning to help schools develop better measures of their effectiveness and also demonstrated the central office staff's willingness to accept feedback on their effectiveness. The training we provided for teachers in the area of performance assessment helped them transform the teacher-student relationship through engaging students in a dialogue about the definition of quality and making students more responsible for their learning through self-assessment, peer review, and student-led conferences. The training became a forum for discussions about the need for change in the classroom.

Year Two Developing a Shared Vision

In Year Two, we realized the need to talk more in depth with all staff at the schools

about our goals and values. Simply giving them a package of indicators to use was not enough. A lesson from this year was the difference between setting direction *for* people and getting commitment *from* people. Several strategies were used to help build this commitment:

- District leaders met intensively with school staff: Toward the end of the second year the superintendent and assistant superintendent for instructional services spent one full day in each school in the district, meeting in small groups with staff. These sessions provided an opportunity for discussions about the meaning of indicators, goals for teaching and learning, concerns, philosophical differences, and success stories. These visits with school staff have continued and have been instrumental in building an awareness among teachers of the need to provide engaging and quality work for students. Teachers and administrators were encouraged to rethink the classroom role for teachers from that of ultimate authority to coach. From these conversations, a commitment to a common definition of a problem (the changing demands of society) emerged. We tried to explain that schools had not done a bad job in the past, but that societal changes required schools to change.

  We found our school site visits, in which we engaged administrators and teachers in a dialogue about the quality of their tasks (teaching), produced some of the most valuable learning for all of us. Naturally, principals and teachers felt somewhat apprehensive about what we might observe in these site visits. What would happen, we wondered, to the quality of schools' improvement efforts if they knew in advance what we were looking for—if they, like our students, had the quality criteria in advance? What if they had a list of questions "to study" and discuss related to the dimensions of instructional quality expected before our school visit?

  In these "school improvement conversations," district leaders also acted as critics, questioning whether proposed school changes had been properly researched and thought through (i.e., had the school leadership done their homework?). For example, a request from a faculty to go to block scheduling was turned down because the superintendent felt that the proper amount of "homework" hadn't been done (idea researched, data on attitudes collected, community input gathered, successful sites visited). The request was approved in a subsequent year after more study. Thus, the conversations between district leaders and school improvement teams helped institutionalize the need for studying research, collecting data, and involving parents and staff as part of the planning process.

  We believe this process—getting schools to focus on data, research, and a shared commitment to explore what instructional practices will work—is helping build a district-wide "culture of inquiry." It is also important to note that we added a staff member to the central office whose primary responsibility was to help schools collect data, analyze testing results, and find research. Through this position, we communicated again the degree to which we planned to support the use of research and data at school sites.

- Central office staff created a participative process for allocating district funds for technology and staff development: As a small, poor district, we had limited funds for school improvement projects. We did not want to foster counterproductive competition among schools through the way we allocated our scarce resources. At the same time, we wanted schools to realize a higher degree of accountability for funds received for improvement projects. We decided to create a district-wide, participative, decision-making process to allocate technology and staff development funds as part of the school improvement planning

cycle. In order to reduce competition among all schools and increase the awareness of district funding priorities, the funding decisions were made by committees composed of teacher representatives from each school. What we thought was a dilemma (competition for scare resources in the improvement process) actually resulted in school improvement teams building more thoughtful proposals and in district committees taking the needs of the entire district into account in making their decisions. Having to develop proposals in these two areas enhanced the school and district planning process and generated district-wide clarity about problems and changes needed. When funding was received by a school, there was a powerful commitment to the other schools involved in awarding funds that ensured effective use and implementation.

- District leaders introduced the concept of "quality work" for students through the use of a teacher action research group: The third strategy for building a shared vision was the creation of a district-wide "teacher as researcher" group led by the superintendent. Fifty teachers volunteered to work in this study group to explore how students felt about schoolwork. The teachers conducted interviews with students and asked them for their thoughts about the components of quality work (e.g., what kind of work could you be given that would make you want to persevere?). This research went a long way toward helping make the concept of quality work for students a concrete concept in the minds of many teachers.

Lessons Learned

At the end of the second year, the use of indicators and self-evaluation of effectiveness were part of the planning process at most schools. Not surprisingly, the kind of school leadership that existed at each school made all the difference in the degree to which research and thinking about indicators became part of the school improvement conversation. Some principle changes were made to ensure schools had the type of leadership they needed to lead substantive school improvement conversations.

Year Three: Sustaining a Culture of Inquiry

We came to recognize over these years that improving professional practice and student learning required a total team effort and that the team had to be the entire district. Writers about the school reform process have referred to the school as the unit of change within public education. There is no question in our minds that schools are the key unit of change and that they need to be the unit of accountability.

However, our work has also led us to realize that the culture of a single school is tied to the larger organization—the school district—and that how schools change over time is directly related to how the district directs the change. In our opinion the school is the unit of change, but the district must be the unit that sets direction to create enduring change.

We felt strongly when we started our reform process that unless we were able to become a true learning organization the new knowledge and behaviors needed from adults to improve conditions for students would simply not be acquired. It is important to emphasize the key role played by the top leadership in the district in creating this environment. Not only did the superintendent on numerous occasions tell all employees to focus on improving teaching and learning and not test scores, but he conducted a funeral early in his tenure in the district in order to bury all of the old teaching practices. The funeral was complete with mourners and wailers who appropriately lamented the passing of these old friends.

While the Board of Education did many things to encourage change and reform, the most powerful occurred at the end of the first and second years of our efforts. Concluding each of these years, the Board sponsored a party for all school improvement team members in the district. Toward the end of each party, the board members provided the entertainment for the 150 in attendance. The first year's entertainment was the Board dressed as a wild and crazy rock band lip synching music. The second year was a game of jeopardy which involved every school team in some way. These events were certainly fun, but the Board made sure that every person who attended heard the message, "We appreciate you, we support you, and we are willing to do foolish things so that you will know that we too are risk-takers." Collectively, through their actions the superintendent and the board very powerfully articulated that this reform effort was not about just tinkering around the edges but about fundamentally changing the way business was done.

Interpreting State Test Results

We describe these ongoing culture-building strategies because they proved important in our third year when we faced a dilemma over our state test results. North Carolina's state testing program has consisted of two types of tests for some years—multiple choice and open-ended. Like most districts with a high poverty rate (55%), our district has always performed below the state average on these tests and our performance over time could best be described as "flat." The multiple choice tests measure a child's knowledge of the content of the state curriculum in grades 3-8. The open-ended tests require students to receive some information and then to use it to produce an answer. These tests are also tied to the state curriculum and are given in grades 3-8.

At the end of our second year (1993-94), we realized some positive growth on the open-ended tests and were encouraged. The results from our third year (1994-95) were extremely positive. When comparing how we did by grade level from the previous year (measuring different children), our scores improved in reading at grades 3, 4, 6, and 7. Scores improved in math at grades 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8. When we compared our cohort growth rate to the state's (same children over time), we out-performed the state in four of five grade spans in reading and four of five grade spans in math. This growth rate is significantly better than our previous year's growth. A final way to review these data is by school results. Five of our eight schools exceeded the state growth rate in over 80% of the grade spans measured. There were also a number of instances in which individual school averages exceeded those of the state. We believe these tests measure most closely what had been the focus of our district over the last two years. We believe these results are the bottom-line profits resulting from our emphasis on the customers and quality services.

Despite our extraordinary gains on open-ended tests in grade 3-8, our scores on the state's multiple-choice tests in these same grades showed no change over the same period. While we were not pleased with the results, they are not surprising given the fact that we exerted little or no organizational effort toward that end. This decision was made because we felt that doing well on these tests would not tell us whether or not we were moving toward our organizational vision. In other words, doing well on multiple choice tests would not measure whether we were preparing our students to live and work successfully in the 21st century.

Our district paid a price in the media for this decision since the multiple-choice test results of districts were reported by the state. Thus,

in the newspaper, it was made to look as if we had made no improvement in student achievement. The open-ended results were never reported. This became a real test of our marketing strategies and of the trust that existed between the district and the public.

Analyzing Our System Needs

After two years of hard work, we did not want our concern over lack of progress in multiple choice test results to throw us into a non-productive focus on raising test scores at any cost. However, we took these results seriously and tried to understand possible explanations.

We felt a small part of the problem might be that students were not accustomed to the multiple choice test format. Indeed, why should they be, since we had focused on performance assessment and taking risks to improve teaching and learning, not multiple choice tests? Secondly, our students might have done well on the open-ended tests, because we had focused on writing skills. The open-ended items might have allowed a child skilled in writing but deficient in some reading or math content to still perform well on the open-ended tests.

But, most importantly, the test results helped us realize that we had seriously overestimated teachers' training in, and skill at, teaching reading, writing, and math, especially to at-risk populations. We already knew that most elementary teachers reported they did not feel comfortable with their own background in mathematics, and we also discovered that most of them had taken only one course in teaching reading. We were not sure our training efforts had adequately prepared all teachers to utilize the latest in research and proven instructional methods to successfully teach all children in our diverse student population.

In our own background of work in larger districts, we were accustomed to larger numbers of teachers with Master's degrees and much greater familiarity with the research on effective schools, Whole Language, and the implications of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics' Standards. Therefore, we had assumed that all teachers knew how to teach reading, writing, and mathematics. We had assumed that if we provided a better, more collegial, and team-oriented environment for teachers it would resolve problems with student achievement. Consequently, our strategies the first three years focused on generic teaching skills such as cooperative learning, cooperative discipline, Paidea proposal, etc.—strategies that can be used in any subject area. In our reflection in this third summer, we recognized the need to help teachers develop more knowledge about teaching the basics across the curriculum, especially to a diverse population.

Year Four Encouraging Teacher and Student Accountability

A New State Accountability Plan

As we entered our fourth year of school reform, a new accountability variable entered the equation. The state proposed to dramatically change its accountability plan from comparing districts to state averages each year to the growth of students in each school. Previously, the state relied primarily on comparing how well the entire district's students did on multiple-choice tests by grade or course, compared to a different group of students who took the tests the previous year. This plan inevitably led to unfair comparisons of poor districts to wealthier ones, in which no matter how much poor districts had improved student achievement, they usually came in "below state average" and below wealthier districts.

North Carolina's new ABC Accountability Plan proposed basing accountability on the growth of the same cohort of students as they moved from grade to grade in a given school. The state would give each school in the state (grades 3-8) growth goals by grade in reading and in math, based on the average statewide student growth from one grade to the next in these two areas. These growth goals would be greater for schools with students who were below the state average so that over time (it is hoped) they would catch up. The state also proposed a bonus program that would award money to a school staff that increased their student achievement scores by 110% of the expected year's growth.

Our district staff debated the merits of participating in a pilot of this new accountability plan. On one hand, we were worried about the negative impact of high-stakes testing based solely on multiple-choice tests as proposed in the ABC Plan. We knew the state multiple-choice tests would still not give a complete and comprehensive picture of whether our students were developing the knowledge and skills they would need for success after high school.

On the other hand, a strength of the new ABC Plan was that it offered an opportunity to base accountability on making progress with all students wherever they started, rather than on relative comparisons between well-funded and less well-funded districts. Participation in the ABC Plan would also allow us a voice in shaping the statewide plan. In the end, the overwhelming majority of staff in each of our schools voted to participate in the ABC pilot. This decision greatly increased the pressure on each school to develop plans focused on implementing the best instructional strategies for improving reading, writing, and math across the whole school.

Encouraging Individual Teacher Growth

Realizing that our teachers had very little training in research-based strategies for teaching reading and writing, we engaged the help of a consultant to help our teachers learn how to implement research-based strategies to teach reading and writing across the curriculum.

One of the first questions our experienced teachers asked about the outside consultant was, "On what authority does she speak?" In effect, they were asking if the consultant was the superintendent's "new guru" and whether everyone had to do what she said. This concern provided a unique opportunity for us to further build the culture of inquiry we believe we must have if instruction and consequently student achievement are to continue improving in the district. Our first response was that we did not want the introduction of a new consultant—or anyone else—to erode the progress we had made in getting people to stop saying "Just tell me what you want me to do." We did not want just compliance to yet another set of prescriptions; we wanted individual teacher commitment to search for better ways to reach all kids. We affirmed that our outside consultant spoke with the same authority any of us should speak, namely, research and clinical practices based on that research.

The questions asked about the authority of the consultant helped us realize that we needed to encourage all teachers to continue to refine their beliefs about good instructional practices through reading the research and evaluating what works and doesn't work with their students. It was obvious from our previous school visits that many educators continued to use instructional practices, such as assigning worksheets or direct instruction in spelling and grammar isolated from children's writing, that research had proved ineffective. Research can provide guidance,

but it must be used in concert with hard looks at how practices work with children in the particular classroom or school. Reading the research and evaluating the impact of new practices tried is not the province of just the school improvement team. We realized that a truly accountable school must also support teachers individually in their reading of research and in their evaluation of their practices.

We were committed to

- **Helping teachers become better at evaluating their own practice (teacher as self-assessors):** Our goal is to develop self-assessment tools through which teachers can assess how far along they are in being able to use effective instructional practices and in using this information not only to plan training but to also support the crucial dialogue with colleagues regarding what they find in implementing new practices. We also hope this work will result in clearer guidelines for administrators and specialists to use in observing and providing helpful feedback as they visit classrooms.

  Over the summer and early fall of 1995, we engaged our leaders in training and dialogue designed to articulate quality instructional standards. The outside consultant provided intense leadership training in research-based practices to improve reading, writing, and math instruction. In effect, she began to help leaders and teachers develop criteria for evaluating the quality of instruction in their buildings. She provided examples of quality instruction through modeling lessons in each building and provided feedback to teachers and administrators.

  These discussions culminated in the development of a self-rating instrument for K-8 teachers to use in assessing their instructional practices in reading and writing. In the fall of 1996, this self-rating instrument (Appendix C) was made available to teachers so they could reflect on "where they are." It is very difficult to improve any skill or performance area in life without good, *individualized* feedback. We had hoped principals would be able to use these forms to provide informal feedback to teachers, thus reinforcing the "standards" for instructional practice.

  However, we underestimated the power of existing cultural norms. Many teachers had only experienced less-than-helpful evaluations/feedback from principals. Many interpreted what was intended as a self-assessment guide as a new summative evaluation instrument. Teachers expressed concerns about the lack of detail in the self-rating instrument and its rigidity in not taking individual teacher styles into account.

  Thus, we are now spending a year in dialogue with schools to work on these issues. A lesson learned from the district perspective is that developing a norm of no blame in the use of teacher self-assessment instruments and administrator feedback is slow going because it runs counter to most teachers' experience with judgmental, evaluation systems.

- **Encouraging teachers to conduct action research and collect data that informs practice (teachers as researchers):** We are dealing with the need for broad-based use of research and evaluation in our district reform efforts by encouraging all our leaders to engage teachers as action researchers as the entire school seeks to make sense of the data on student achievement and the implications of current research for instructional practices. We are not asking teachers to treat research or its clinical implications as a cookbook of recipes which can then be mindlessly implemented without regard for the particular circumstances. Rather, we are asking our leaders and teachers to make a

good-faith effort to try out and fine-tune research-based instructional strategies in the search for practices that will enable all students to succeed. Most importantly, we are asking them to establish the time and cultural norms that would encourage teachers to collect data and share their experiences in using research-based instructional strategies.

This approach is already paying dividends in teachers' willingness to take risks and implement promising instructional strategies. Recently, in a conversation with the instructional specialist, an elementary teacher, who attempted to implement cooperative learning by using groups of four, reported total confusion and off-task behavior. The specialist suggested that since her students had had no prior experience working in cooperative groups, pairs of students might be a more productive way to begin. The teacher tried this approach and reported great success. Rather than trying something new, experiencing frustration or failure, and ditching the change, the teacher successfully experienced the evaluation-feedback loop.

Similarly, second grade teachers in another school decided to try new assessment tools to monitor their students' entry level and mid-year progress in reading. The mid-year results these teachers decided to collect have shown almost all students making such substantial progress that the teachers are feeling affirmed and encouraged in their willingness to risk new instructional approaches. The data on students not making progress has enabled them to seek additional resources and approaches to help those students. Thus, these teachers also experienced success in evaluating their practice.

As district leaders we have tried to support the idea of individuals studying their practice in collegial groups in several ways. Our district-wide leadership team (principals and central office) started a book study initiative to analyze educational research in a variety of areas. This idea in turn was passed on by some principals to their individual schools. We try to share and value individual teachers' experiences as part of a video series for the general public shown on television and we tell stories about experiences of educators in our district who have reflected on and changed practice in successful ways.

- Reducing pressure to teach to the test: Despite our best efforts to keep state-mandated testing in perspective, we have encountered instances of teachers overcome with anxiety about doing well on such tests. These problem situations provide further opportunities for us to engage our key administrators and teacher leadership in an ongoing dialogue about what really matters and how we can keep our focus on a clear long-term vision of quality instruction and student achievement, rather than succumb to the temptation of over-focusing on short-term test results. We are more convinced than ever that analyzing what students need to learn does not necessarily tell you how they best will learn it. Building a culture of inquiry, in which teachers are both empowered and expected to use research and collect data and dialogue with colleagues to improve instructional practices, is the cornerstone of our continuing efforts to transform education in our district.

Encouraging Individual Student Ownership and Responsibility

As a district, we encouraged our ten schools to commit to self-evaluation and continual improvement through our use of indicators, site visits, and other means. Through our support for consultants to help teachers develop quality teaching standards, emphasis on teachers as researchers, and celebrations of individual successes, we began to create a culture of accountability for teaching excellence. Finally, we have also realized that

students must understand and take responsibility for working toward desired outcomes.

Our strategies at this level included the following:

- Classroom assessment that focused on student self-assessment:

  Need: Students do not come naturally to self-assessment of work completed. This kind of student ownership must be taught by teachers. Our summer training program for teachers in alternative assessment and quality classroom assessment has been instrumental in helping teachers bring students into the learning process as partners.

  Impact: As a result of the classroom assessment training we have offered, we have seen teachers increasingly use rubrics in the instructional and assessment process as a way of communicating to students what is expected. We have also seen increases in the use of portfolios and student-led parent conferencing as self-assessment tools for students. In our district, students are now more involved than ever in the process of assessing their own work. Teachers increasingly articulate desired goals, discuss "anchor performances" (the kind and quality of paper, product, project expected), and outline for students the process or steps that will lead to a quality product. All courses at the high school now routinely distribute a syllabus directed to students and parents which articulates course objectives, background required for the course, and how grades are determined.

- A required senior project awakens our seniors:

  Need: Early in our first year in the district, we began looking for high schools that used some form of performance assessments or exhibitions of student work to determine readiness for graduation. With the help of SERVE, we found several sites that used graduation exhibitions. These schools were experiencing success in asking seniors to complete a comprehensive, self-determined research project that pushed them to develop and demonstrate independent learning skills. Our district worked with SERVE to bring in two teachers from Medford, Oregon who had a successful senior project program. These teachers later trained representatives from our high school faculty on the implementation of senior projects. Senior English teachers began to experiment with requiring a senior project, which became a requirement in all senior English classes in 1994-95.

  The project consists of three categories: research paper, portfolio, and oral presentation. Each student must complete all categories during a nine-week period. The oral presentation is the final element of the project and is judged by a panel that includes community members and faculty. Over 100 business leaders are invited to serve as judges over a nine-day time frame and great support is received. (See Appendix D for the scoring rubric used.)

  Impact: In reflecting on the impact of implementing a senior project program, one of the primary benefits was a new commitment at the high school and throughout the district to developing student competencies that transcended disciplines (e.g., research, writing, and speaking skills). The program represented a distinct move away from compartmentalization and isolation, fostering a dialogue across disciplines that resulted in increased collaboration on courses taught (e.g., U.S. history and English teachers working together). It increased our instructional emphasis on oral presentations at the high school and resulted in introducing a new speech course as well as increased use of teaching students to make oral presentations in other courses. The program dramatically increased student skill and

interest in word processing as part of creating the paper. It also sparked interest in implementing a junior year project to help students identify a topic to pursue in the senior year as well as develop requisite research and oral presentation skills. The development of a senior project rubric for assessing the projects led to other applications of the use of rubrics as instructional tools in high school classes.

- A new promotion/intervention policy that embodies high expectations for students:

  Need: For too long, children attending school in this district had been moved along from one grade to the next—ready or not. The process of "social promotions" resulted from research that said retaining students didn't help, especially when students were given the same things to do all over again. As a result of this social promotion practice, teachers have found it increasingly difficult to meet the needs of students who are years behind in reading and math skills.

  In addition, too many students seemed to feel no accountability, no consequences for their own failure to learn, often putting forth little or no effort and sometimes not even attending school regularly. Teachers frequently reported these students felt it did not matter whether they did any work in school since they would be promoted anyway. Although this work-avoidance attitude among some students was evident during the school year (refusal to participate in class activities, complete assignments, or do homework even when they had the ability), it was most pronounced in summer school attendance.

  In 1994-95, the district continued offering a traditional summer school program for those students in grades 3, 6, and 8 who did not meet grade level standards at the end of the year. Despite the fact that almost half the students at each of these grade levels did not meet those standards, many did not attend the summer program, and attendance was poor among those who did. Participation was highest among third graders, but among sixth and eighth graders, participation was low. Only 30 students out of almost 200 underachieving eighth graders chose to attend summer school. Teachers felt that since students knew they would be promoted anyway, there was no reason to attend.

  Unfortunately, the consequences were realized in high school, especially in the freshman year, when large numbers of students failed required core courses. Often these students were surprised to learn that they would not be "passed on" to a high school diploma unless they passed required coursework. The history of social promotion contributed to a high school cohort dropout rate approaching 40% (i.e., around 40% of the freshmen did not graduate with their entering class four years later). Teachers, not only at the high school but at all levels, repeatedly asked the district for help in addressing the problem of work-avoidant students.

  Policy Goals: In a move to reverse this trend, the district spent considerable time developing a new Promotion/Intervention Policy (Appendix E). The goals of the policy were to help students focus on their learning, assist those students in need, and establish criteria for progressing through the levels of schooling. The new policy requires that students meet specific standards before moving to the next level of schooling. It is designed to catch students early who are behind and to provide the additional time and support necessary to accelerate their learning. It was also designed to increase accountability for students and their parents, to create a reasonable consequence—additional time during the summer for learning—for not meeting grade level standards.

Students must show they can do the work at the next level of schooling to be promoted without conditions at the end of the school year. The new policy sets entry requirements at three critical transition points: at the end of primary (third grade) before entering elementary level grades (fourth grade), at the end of the elementary level (sixth grade) before moving to the middle school, and at the end of middle school (eighth grade) before moving to the high school. Before moving on to the next level of schooling, students must show they can do the work at that level.

The new policy

- *mandates extra schooling for those not able to meet these new standards. A School Year Plus summer program is now required for those students who need more help and time to meet grade level expectations in reading, writing, and math. If students and their parents refuse to attend the School Year Plus program, the child is retained in the grade. We did not implement this policy believing that retention would help the child's achievement, but to establish a serious enough consequence to get the attention and participation of students in additional schooling during the summer. Better than 95% of those recommended for School Year Plus attended.*

- *ensures that a student's ability to move from one level to another will not be judged on the results of a single test or by a single person. The policy established district-level teacher committees who review additional evidence supplied by the child's teacher to determine whether the test results are an adequate indication of the student's ability to do grade-level work.*

- *provides year-long additional support for students who need it. In addition to the School Year Plus summer program, every school created a conditional promotion program at grades 4, 7, and 9 that provided varying degrees of additional tutorial support, computer assisted instruction, advisors, and other strategies to support students who still were either slightly or well below grade level standards even after attending the School Year Plus program.*

Impact: We made a decision not to retain any child who attended the School Year Plus program and made an effort to learn. **Retention rates remained very low in the district.** Instead, we planned and provided additional funds for schools to establish conditional promotion programs at the receiving levels—4th, 7th, and 9th grade. These conditional promotion programs were designed by the schools and varied from additional intensive time and tutorial help to semi self-contained programs for lowest-achieving students at the middle and high school. While most students made tremendous gains during the summer program, very few reached grade level and were unconditionally promoted. The majority are continuing to receive additional assistance during the school year to be successful at their new grade level.

The issue of how to effectively intervene and accelerate the achievement of students who are far below grade level continues to be a significant topic of debate and research in our district. More than 20% of our kindergarten students start school two or more years behind their peers. This percentage stays relatively constant throughout school, with around 20% scoring at Level I, "well below grade level," on state end-of-grade tests (grades 3-8). Teachers and schools continue to struggle with how to involve parents and get them to shoulder a fair share of the responsibility in helping these students catch up. All of us question and collect data to evaluate whether the interventions we design can compensate for the debilitating effects of poverty,

racism, family dysfunction, drug abuse, hopelessness, and despair which characterize the homes of too many of our students.

In conclusion, we feel with the three strategies described above (classroom assessment training for teachers that stressed student self-assessment methods, a senior project program, and a new intervention/promotion policy), we have made significant strides toward higher levels of accountability at the student level.

How Do We Know How We're Doing?

As a district office, we have several options for evaluating progress: evaluate informally through listening and observing in schools, evaluate formally through collecting data on specific initiatives and through looking at school indicators, and look at test score results.

Informal Sources of Information

As a small district with limited resources, we depend heavily on informal evaluations. Our qualitative evaluations (through school site visits, observations at meetings, and feedback from principals and specialists who are observing in the classrooms) tell us that schools are changing and instruction is improving. As we begin the 1996-97 school year, we observe an extremely powerful sense of professional pride and confidence among our instructional staff as a result of the growth they have seen in students' performance. Our seventh grade math teachers are rethinking aspects of their instructional program resulting from the increased knowledge level of this year's entering seventh graders. Our high school administrators and teachers are enthusiastic about dealing with School Year Plus ninth graders who are not only better prepared but have a positive attitude about working hard to learn. Teachers are reporting that their students are focused and working with more confidence, and discussions about what constitutes "good" teaching are increasingly happening.

Formal Evaluation Sources

Again, because of resource limitations we cannot evaluate all new initiatives to the extent we would like, but we do evaluate some critical initiatives more formally. An initiative of critical importance to our success is the Conditional Promotion Program described earlier in which each school is responsible for designing intervention strategies for students who have attended the School Year Plus Summer Program but are still working below grade level. Our Director of Research and Testing formally evaluates the match between the interventions each school designed on paper and what actually happens in providing the services to these students. What the schools say they are doing is not always consistent with what she finds with her site visits, observations, and interviews. The information is used to help schools improve their intervention programs rather than to blame them or put them on the defensive. As we found with the indicators, some schools with strong leadership and a commitment to continuous improvement accept evaluations of their programs for what they can learn to improve them. Others are more threatened and tend to "cover up" problems with implementation.

What have we learned from indicators? As one would expect, not all of our indicators found their way into continuing use (Appendix A). Some were necessary to communicate our vision but did not make it to the data collection stage. The most important indicators to us as district leaders are the entrance requirements for the three levels. Some schools have many more students not yet meeting the requirements for promotion which impact resources needed. These are data we follow very carefully.

We have not mandated teacher, student, or parent survey data district-wide but left decisions about these data at the school level. Our list of indicators was meant to help educate the schools about possibilities in these areas not as a mandate for what they had to collect. Schools have actively used teacher survey data and typically do make changes when results indicate lagging support. Student surveys have not been widely used yet. The commitment to actively consider student input comes slowly. The high school has recently made a commitment to begin conducting an annual student survey.

Although parent surveys have not been used extensively, schools have bought into the idea of the importance of parent input and are obtaining that input in more qualitative ways (focus groups, involvement on committees). Finally, we attempted a graduate survey which we believe is critical feedback for us but were not able to obtain a high response rate. We hope to work further on this source of indicator data.

Test Results

Our state test results have been positive. The 1995-96 results of each school in the district on the state's multiple-choice tests in reading and math (grades 3-8) were very positive. The state estimated that 30% of the schools in the ten pilot districts would achieve the "exemplary growth" standard of 110% of an average year's growth in student achievement. In the first year of the ABC Plan pilot, 40% of the state pilot schools actually reached the 110% exemplary growth standard.

In our district, 90% of our schools (nine of ten) reached this standard. The tenth school, a middle school, reached 110% growth in reading (the only middle school in the state ABC pilot to reach exemplary growth in anything) but missed it in math. These results indicate that students learned in every school, regardless of its demographic composition. When we disaggregated these scores, we found that all subsets of students (gifted, minorities, females, low-performing, etc.) showed growth. On average, every group of students in each school made extraordinary progress.

And we achieved these results without excluding more students from testing, a typical side effect of high-stakes testing. We tested over 98% of all students in grades 3-8—the highest percentage ever tested in our district. Our 2.5% rate of excluding exceptional children from testing was half the state-allowed rate of 5%.

We experienced similar results on the state writing tests which are administered at grades 4, 7, and 10. At grade 7, we increased the number of students scoring at the state standard by 14%—significantly above the state average. At grade 10, we almost doubled the percent of students performing at the state standard, which moved us to just .1 below the state average. At grade 4, our writing scores improved, but we are still below the state average.

In addition to the better-than-one-year-average growth all students made, the number of students performing at or above grade level in reading increased 6% and 9.3% in math. However, this still left almost half the students functioning below grade level at the end of grades 3, 6, and 8.

After inviting all students who failed to meet grade level standards to attend an extended one month summer session, we wound up with over 500 third, sixth, and eighth grade students in the School Year Plus summer program.

Using the Degrees of Reading Power Test to measure student growth, the third graders recorded .6 of a year's growth in reading,

sixth graders 2.5 years of growth, and eighth graders 1.5 years of growth in reading. To measure growth in mathematics, we used a version of our state tests that reports student performance in levels of achievement I through IV. Over 50% of all summer students tested demonstrated gains of at least half of an achievement level, and over 25% of all students progressed by an entire achievement level in math.

Thus, we think our bottom line results are improving, and we also feel strongly that the quality of our delivery processes is improving.

Final Thoughts

Our accountability strategies have evolved. In our first "cut," we felt indicators could communicate and be effective when passed on to schools, but they needed to represent the district vision of the importance of process, not just the state bottom line of standardized test scores. Next we added the element of site visits, realizing that dialogue and conversations were needed to help schools in the district buy in and understand the vision we were trying to articulate with indicators. On a side note, a parallel district effort to train teachers in good classroom assessment practices, particularly alternative assessment matched to higher-level instructional goals, helped us realize that, with our site visits, we were assessing school effectiveness without making our expectations clear to those in the schools.

The development of standards of professional practice in reading, writing, and math emerged as a need from our state test results and our dialogue with teachers. Out of this work with a consultant came the growing realization that we needed to support teachers in their roles as action researchers in their classrooms and self-assessors of their teaching effectiveness if accountability was to be internalized at the individual teacher level. Principals and specialists realized their role in providing good feedback to teachers to help them improve.

At the student level, we worked on better classroom assessment, a senior project program, and a promotion/intervention policy that would increase student responsibility for meeting standards. Thus, there are many pieces to the school and individual teacher accountability puzzle.

The expansion of our accountability system has significantly changed the culture of our school district and dramatically improved student achievement. The cultural change resulted in our district receiving the Governor's Most Outstanding Entrepreneurial Schools Award for 1995. This award is given annually by the Governor's Teacher Advisory Committee to the school or school district in North Carolina that best exemplifies bold leadership and responsible risk-taking to advance teaching and improve learning in the state of North Carolina.

We have come to understand that the pace of change is just as important to continuous improvement as the pace of a lesson is to learning. We learned that the best pace for change is not always brisk. People must have time to do research, plan, practice, and, finally, internalize the change.

If public education is to continue as the institution that creates the public of the future, then it will have to develop the capacity for continual improvement. Our experience has taught us that this transformation of our 100-year-old notions of schooling is a profound cultural transformation that will not take place easily or quickly. **Changing the culture of school and the very nature of schooling requires a monumental shift in thinking, not the mindless application of trivial improvements to the current**

institution. This type of significant paradigm shift is potentially dangerous and should not be attempted without strong visionary leadership and a board of education committed to support the effort over time.

Many have assumed that student achievement is the only thing that matters in improving schools. This assumption has certainly helped in moving beyond traditional measures of school performance, such as the professional degrees of teachers, the number of books in the library, and other old accreditation requirements which had a questionable relationship to student achievement. However, our experience and reading in school reform over the last two decades have convinced us that the exclusive preoccupation with only the "bottom line" of student achievement has produced its own set of unintended consequences and blinded us to the crucial issues of creating organizations that connect quickly to change or of getting students to do quality work. This same institutional blindness almost resulted in the complete collapse of the U.S. automotive industry before its leaders discovered that quality must come before profits.

"Traumatic," "difficult," "professionally dangerous," and "frustrating" are all words or phrases that describe the act of leading significant school reform. However, if one concludes that the success of public schools is tied closely to the continued success of our democratic society, that this society is changing rapidly, and that schooling's purpose is to create the public which perpetuates the principle of civic participation in our society, then caring educators must decide to engage in significant change that cannot be measured by test scores alone.

One can also conclude from our work that while focusing on improving practice and quality will result in long-term improvement, short-term survival requires some attention be given to preparing students to perform on the type of state accountability tests administered. However addressing such a concern need not (and we would argue should not) result in an exclusive preoccupation with raising test scores at any cost. Our approach has been to include not only test scores but also research-based instructional practices as the focus of dialogue with teachers and administrators to build a culture of inquiry. Our belief is that there are no panaceas, no quick and easy solutions for teachers to implement "off the shelf" with no risk-taking and no ongoing dialogues with colleagues to assess and fine-tune their effectiveness. Our commitment is to use every problem, every occasion of concern about student performance and effective instruction, as an opportunity to build this culture.

It is our hope that this document will convince readers that the only way to be successful in this endeavor is to value teachers and administrators as resources to be nurtured. If readers focus on building their professional capacities and gaining their professional commitment to quality, children will benefit. Most importantly, however, is that such an approach will result in a school district that will create a future public imbued with confidence, a sense of purpose, and a respect for learning and tolerance—a future public that will continue the ideals upon which our country was founded.

There are no shortcuts.

Conclusion: Summarizing Strategies to Ensure Quality

CHAPTER THREE

Clearly, district leaders play a significant role in developing a culture that values high standards of professional practice, individual growth, self-reflection, and honest dialogue. In reflecting on the experiences of the leaders in the Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County School District, we learned that district leaders can build accountability as self-evaluation and reflection and a commitment to quality at three levels: the individual school, teacher, and student. Four years ago, as the new leaders of this district, they started incorporating "process" indicators into school improvement planning in the belief that these indicators would help them communicate to school staff their vision for what the process of schooling should look like. Realizing that these indicators alone were not sufficient to communicate their goals and vision, more strategies evolved over the four-year period and are summarized in this chapter.

Strategies to Build a School Commitment to Quality and Self-Evaluation

Here are the strategies the district used to help strengthen the school improvement process.

- Develop indicators of school effectiveness that reflect the district vision and that go beyond test scores. By developing indicators (See Appendix A), the district provides structure and communicates that quality processes (instruction, staff development, parent involvement) are critical.

- Realize that manuals on the school improvement process are not enough. The school improvement process was seen as so important that the superintendent and assistant superintendent conducted the training for the principals themselves. They also took the time to further communicate their goals and values by visiting schools and talking and listening to faculty. These forums helped school staff understand the need for and commitment to change.

- Review ideas proposed by school improvement teams with an eye for adequate study of the problem. If a school improvement team cannot explain the research and the background needs assessment data collected to document why they feel a change is needed, the district can keep pushing for more review until the problem has been adequately studied.

- Establish a district-wide, participative, decision-making process for the allocation of technology and staff development funds. In this case, the district established a district-wide committee of teachers to review each school's application for staff development and technology funds and make the award decisions.

- Model action research. The superintendent, who acted as the group leader, asked for volunteer teachers to study the meaning of quality work for students.

- Model a commitment to personal excellence through developing a mechanism (See Appendix B) for district leaders and staff to receive feedback from those they serve in schools (principals, teachers, students, others).

- Offer more research support to schools. The district created a research position to serve schools in analyzing state test data, assessing needs, and finding relevant research.

The strategies above may not work for all districts. They are not proposed as the "right" or only strategies; they are simply strategies successfully used in one district. Strategies for improving school accountability need to fit with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes of school leaders. For example, an associate superintendent from another North Carolina district commented upon reviewing an earlier draft of this document that developing additional indicators for school leaders to consider in the improvement planning process would not have worked in their district. The school administrators in the district previously were accustomed to being prescribed to by the central office. In their district, adding more indicators would have overwhelmed and confused school improvement teams and made it more difficult for them to prioritize and focus. In working with their school leadership teams, new district leaders had more success building the "process" areas as strategies to improve achievement rather than setting additional improvement goals around the indicators.

One thing that is clear, however, is the critical importance of honest, open, and regular dialogues between district leaders and schools. Obviously, the smaller number of schools in a district, the easier these conversations are to manage.

Strategies to Build a Teacher Commitment to Self-Evaluation

The district used several strategies in trying to build a teacher commitment to improving practice.

- Initiate efforts to develop high standards for professional practice.

  In Elizabeth City-Pasquotank, district leaders realized that teachers were not conversant with the research on what works in reading instruction. As a first step toward increasing awareness, the superintendent set the tone by having a two-day retreat with school-level and central office administrators. The group spent the first day looking at and analyzing the system's data and individual school test results. The second day addressed what research says about how to teach reading and writing so that students are able to succeed. From that discussion, an

awareness developed among school leaders that research can provide guidance on how to improve reading and writing instruction. Subsequently, the district made a reading consultant available to all teachers in grades 1-8 for staff development (discussions about research, modeling of strategies, sharing materials, and observations/feedback).

As these school conversations about reading research continued, questions emerged regarding the specifics of good reading and writing instruction (If I walked into a classroom, what should I see?). To answer these questions, at the conclusion of 1995-96, the district office staff member in charge of language arts and the reading consultant completed a first draft of a self-assessment instrument for teachers based on the many discussions that had occurred during the year. In 1996-97, teachers and principals are using the instrument to assess needs. This draft instrument continues to evolve as it is used and critiqued. In its present form, it is included as Appendix C.

Through this instrument and as a result of the many conversations about what research says, a common vision of what constitutes good professional practice in reading and writing instruction is emerging. The district office staff person feels strongly that this process (of defining good teaching based on research) would never have worked without the commitment from the superintendent to engage administrators district-wide in the discussion of the research base as a first step. A district-wide committee is currently working on another document that defines good math instruction.

- Create book study clubs to encourage teachers to examine their practice relative to the research. The superintendent led building administrators in a book study of *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (1985). Subsequently, some school administrators started book study clubs in their schools.

- Encourage individual teacher action research by providing training, resources, or support groups.

- Address anxiety among teachers that may come from fear of state policies (sanctions for poor or not improving test scores).

Note: Another strategy that SERVE has found successful in encouraging a commitment to professional development is the implementation of formative teacher evaluation systems for tenured teachers (see SERVE report, *Designing Teacher Evaluation Systems that Support Professional Growth*). In this Research and Development program, schools and districts work with SERVE to develop self- and peer-evaluation systems that encourage teachers to take responsibility for setting their own professional growth goals.

Strategies to Build a Student Commitment to Self-Evaluation

Other strategies are suggested to involve students in becoming more accountable for their progress.

- To empower students to self assess, ensure that all teachers receive the assessment training needed to understand quality classroom assessment practices. This training proved to be a key in Elizabeth City-Pasquotank's commitment to self-evaluation because it created a core group of teachers with a better understanding of the importance of laying out expectations in the form of rubrics to students and of the need to empower students to self-assess.

- Consider engaging school faculty in assessment projects like senior projects or portfolio design so students better understand the outcomes expected of them (See Appendix D).

- Develop promotion and intervention policies and programs that communicate expectations to students and provide appropriate interventions when standards aren't met (See Appendix E).

The list above is taken from a review of one district's actions over a four year period. The commitment to self-evaluation at all levels is clear. The district participants will likely discover more strategies as they continue to reflect on their progress. Another district's list may look different. School and district leaders may benefit from building their own strategy list and reflecting on its effectiveness in creating a culture of excellence where continuoual improvement and quality services are realities.

Is the Time Right for Locally-Owned Accountability?

During the last decade, most schools and school districts in the country have been engaging in some type of school reform. These reform efforts have been driven partially by employers who recognize the need for public schooling to prepare students to live and work in a vastly different world than the one in which their parents lived. The economic data are clear: schools will have to educate all children, not only differently but to levels higher than ever before.

This reality dramatically changes the fundamental purpose of schooling in the country. During the last century (the Industrial Age), the purpose of schools was to sort and select the population to determine who would go to college and who would work in the factories. As we enter the Information Age, the purpose of schools has to be to develop the capacity of all students to be successful in a highly technical, rapidly changing world.

Before districts and schools are able to fulfill this new purpose, all stakeholders (administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members) in a community will have to envision schools in new ways. The need is to create a school organization that is concerned with continuous learning and is focused not just on knowledge, but, more importantly, on the application of knowledge. This knowledge must be made meaningful for all students by challenging them to think using "real world" problems. Lastly, students must constantly receive feedback so they will eventually be able to evaluate the quality of their own work.

The district profiled in this publication, along with other districts in the Southeast, is staking itself out in favor of going beyond a test-based accountability system. Such districts are designing balanced, expanded, and flexible accountability strategies around their community's vision of what education should be; promoting and encouraging risk-taking; and rethinking the work in schools necessary to achieve higher and different standards. The districts and schools that are defining accountability as monitoring progress made toward quality services and programs, understand the close link between a focus on means (with an eye toward outcomes) and accountability.

> *To judge the value of an outcome or end, one should understand the nature of the processes or means that led to that end. . . . It's not just that the means are appraised in terms of the ends they lead to, but ends are appraised in terms of the means that produce them (Messick, 1975, pg. 963).*

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Appendix A

Optional District-wide Indicators Proposed in 1993 as Part of School Improvement Planning Process Submitted to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

Elementary Schools

1. Students meeting 1st grade math criteria
2. Students meeting 2nd grade language arts criteria
3. Students meeting 2nd grade math criteria
4. Students meeting 2nd grade language arts criteria
5. Students (random sample) meeting 1st grade science criteria
6. Students (random sample) meeting 2nd grade science criteria
7. Students (random sample) meeting 1st grade Spanish criteria*
8. Students (random sample) meeting 2nd grade Spanish criteria*
9. Third graders meeting upper elementary entrance criteria*
10. Sixth graders meeting middle school entrance criteria*
11. Sixth graders qualifying for Pre-Algebra at 7th grade
12. K-3 students having read/reading average 3 books/month*
13. 4-6 students reading average 2 books/ month*
14. Retention (elementary)*

Middle Schools

15. 7th graders passing Pre-Algebra
16. 8th graders passing Algebra*
17. 8th graders meeting high school entrance criteria*
18. Middle school students reading average 1 book/month
19. Middle school students involved in one or more school sponsored extra-curricular activities
20. Middle school students involved in annual community service project
21. Course failure rates*

High School

22. High school graduating class passing Chemistry
23. High school graduating class passing Physics
24. High school graduating class passing Geometry
25. High school graduating class passing Algebra II
26. High school students involved in one or more school sponsored extra-curricular activities
27. High school students involved in annual community service project
28. High school students involved in apprenticeship programs
29. High school students taking AP courses*
30. High school students taking technology intensive courses
31. High school students involved in decision making
32. High school students participating in alternative assessment
33. SAT verbal scores*
34. SAT math scores*

All Levels

35. In-school suspensions*
36. Out-of-school suspensions*
37. Discipline referrals to office*
38. Exceptional children with IEPs meeting 75 % of IEP

39. Number of students passing physical fitness test*
40. Number of students participating in Fine Arts (chorus, plays, art shows, etc.)

Parents

41. Parents reporting clear understanding of what student is expected to learn
42. Parents reporting clear communication of student progress
43. Parent and community volunteer hours*
44. Parent participation in open house and conferences*
45. Parent education opportunities offered through school

Students

46. Students grades 4-12 reporting school work meaningful and motivating
47. Students grades 4-12 reporting frequently have choice in how to learn
48. Students grades 4-12 reporting frequent use of teaching methods other than lecture, worksheets, independent learning
49. Students grades 4-12 reporting frequent opportunity to work with peers
50. Students grades 4-12 reporting projects lasting one week or more
51. Students grades 4-12 reporting more than one chance to demonstrate learning
52. Students grades 4-12 reporting objectives usually clear
53. Students grades 4-12 reporting grading criteria clear and fair
54. Students grades 4-12 setting and pursuing personal learning goals that show development in duration

Organization/Climate

55. Teachers reporting high degree of collegiality*
56. Teachers reporting high degree of involvement in decision making*
57. Teaching time spent teaching team-developed, team-taught integrated units of instruction of one week duration or more
58. Teachers reporting participation in sponsorship or volunteer time devoted to student extra-curricular activities (during school or after school)

Curriculum

59. Middle and high school courses with published outcomes for student learning that is distributed to students and parents
60. Grades or departments where teachers report using team-developed units
61. Number of teacher developed units in which fine arts are coordinated with other curricular areas

Instruction

62. Schools successfully meeting panel criteria for evidence of new learning
63. Percent of freshman accepted by one or more UNC institutions
64. Percent of freshmen at UNC institutions with AP in English
65. Percent of freshmen at UNC institutions in Calculus or above

Note: Indicators marked with a * are those that were subsequently implemented and used regularly.

Appendix B

Support Staff Feedback Reciprocity

The purpose of this process is to provide the support staff in the district constructive feedback from the schools' perspective concerning their work each year. The school planning team is to reach consensus on a rating for each individual or department. The rating is based on a person's/ department's effectiveness, attitude, availability, and resources provided when called by the school. The rubric provided below is to serve as a guide. If a team awards a rating of 3, 2, or 1, it must then provide suggestions for improving the rating (this process will also provide school planning teams the opportunity to review the type of assistance that they requested during the year).

Department/Unit:

_____

Rating: ☐

Suggestions for Improvement:

_____

_____

_____

Rating

5 Services were provided in a timely and courteous manner. Expertise resulted in relevant, high quality, and cost effective resources being made available. Creative, challenging, and empowering assistance promoted client confidence and effectiveness.

4 Services were provided in a prompt manner. A pleasant, helpful attitude and an adequate knowledge of other resources available were evident. The service was effective in what it was trying to accomplish.

3 Services were sometimes effective and occasionally resourcefulness was demonstrated. Some of the time the responses were prompt, and helpful attitudes were displayed.

2 Services were difficult to obtain and demonstrated limited resourcefulness. Services were delivered in a nonchalant manner.

1 Services were ineffective with resources inadequate or non-available. The services were delivered without concern and in a negative manner.

Appendix C

This is a work in progress and may be revised in a future edition.

Components of Our 1-6 Grade Communication Skills Program

Good instruction integrates all Blocks of Communication Skills and other content areas whenever possible and appropriate.

Teacher Read Aloud
Teacher reads a variety of quality literature to the class daily to model reading strategies and motivate students to read. (Minimum time required for this block–15 minutes)

Self-selected Reading Block with Teacher/Student Conferences
Daily periods are provided for students to practice reading independently from materials they have selected. The teacher uses the self-selected Reading Block to conference with a minimum of five students each day. (Minimum time required for this block–30 minutes)

Teacher Directed Reading Block
Daily periods for direct instruction on comprehension and metacognitive strategies are scheduled, using a variety of quality literature and materials. Flexible grouping practices are implemented based on teaching focus of the lesson. A variety of instructional techniques are incorporated. The three components, Before reading, During Reading, and After reading, should occur daily. (Minimum time required for this block--30 minutes)

Spelling/Phonics Block
The three components, Spelling/Word Wall (words frequently used in writing), Making Words (manipulative phonics), Handwriting Formation, occur daily. (Minimum time required for this block--20-30 minutes)

Writing Block
Daily periods for direct instruction within the framework of the writing process should occur. Instruction in grammar and mechanics is limited to 3-5 minute Daily Oral Language Mini-Lesson. The teacher leads the students through the revision and editing process with individual conferences as the students write. Instruction should follow a developmental process. The students will write in a variety of forms, for a variety of purposes and for a variety of audiences. (Minimum time required for this block–30 minutes)

Take-Home Reading
All students are assigned Recreational Reading on their independent reading level each night as a homework assignment. (Please note that the take-home reading is not from the basal reader–Harcourt/Brace or D.C. Heath.) The teacher maintains a management system for this Block. (Minimum time required–15 minutes)

Beliefs About Teaching Communication Skills

Futurists predict that the twenty-first century will bring new challenges in preparing students for the demands of an information age. They expect the need for an increasingly higher level of literacy.

While students continue to need mastery of enabling skills such as reading, writing, and computing, they must also prepare for the new expanded basics which include problem solving, critical and creative thinking, decision making, flexibility and adaptability, and working collaboratively. The intent of our communication skills curriculum is to equip students with the level of literacy needed to participate as informed and effective citizens in a democratic society, to function effectively in the world of work, and to realize personal fulfillment.

Our communication skills curriculum is based on beliefs that are reflected in current research and best practices. An effective communication skills program must be concerned with both process and content (with how students learn and what they learn). The curriculum should focus on the holistic model for teaching and promote an environment where students learn to employ strategies selectively based upon their backgrounds, text (written, oral, or visual), and purposes for activities. In such an environment, administrators, teaching staff and students are guided by the following principles:

- Communication skills are interrelated, whole-thinking processes utilized by the student to comprehend and convey meaning: oral (listening and speaking), written (reading and writing), and visual (viewing and representing).

- Communication skills are a means for learning and the reading/writing processes are thinking processes.

- Reading is the process of constructing meaning through the interaction among the reader's existing prior background knowledge, the information suggested by written language, and the context of the reading situation.

- The organization and delivery of reading instruction should focus on the holistic model. This model views reading as an interactive language process focused on comprehension rather than a set of subskills learned in isolation with decoding as a focus.

- Learners use three cueing systems on an intuitive and conscious or metacognitive level. Each of these language cueing systems has its function and place in relation to other systems. It is essential that they each be available and functioning in relation to each other if comprehension is to occur. Cues used in communication are:

  - semantic cues (uses concepts, prior knowledge and experiences to make sense of text),

  - syntactic cues (uses language patterns, word order, or grammatical structure to derive meaning), and

  - graphophonic cues (uses letter-sound-match and relationships to derive meaning).

- Phonics (graphophonic cues) should be taught systematically and should be reflected in the materials the students read. Phonics strategies should include teaching students the sounds of letters in isolation and in words, and teaching them to blend the sounds of letters together to produce approximate pronunciation of words. Another strategy to be used is to encourage students to identify words by thinking of other words with similar spellings. Phonics instruction should go hand in hand with opportunities to identify words in meaningful sentences and stories. Phonics should be taught early and kept simple.

- Writing should be taught as a natural and integral part of the curriculum. Instruction should encourage whole pieces of writing for real purposes and real audiences.

- Instruction in grammar (the finer points of writing) are learned best while students are engaged in extended writing that has the purpose of communicating a message to an audience.

- Spelling and handwriting are not subjects but rather tools that writers use.

- Children should spend more time in independent reading. Independent reading should occur in school and out of school because it is consistently related to gains in reading achievement, vocabulary growth and reading fluency.

- Children should have ready access to books in the classroom and school in order to facilitate independent reading at school and out of school. Children in classrooms with libraries read more, express better attitudes toward reading and make greater gains in reading comprehension than children who do not have ready access to books.

- Use of workbook and skill sheet activities should be kept to a minimum and then only used if they actually contribute to growth in the communication skills of reading/writing.

- Children need to be read aloud to by teachers and parents each and everyday. This is the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for success in reading and should be continued throughout the grades.

- Reading and writing like the skill of playing a musical instrument, are not things that are mastered once and for all at a certain age. Rather, they are skills that continue to improve through practice.

- Reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing are processes that enable students to clarify thinking, to investigate, and to increase knowledge in all subject areas. Integrating the-teaching of communication skills with other subjects enhances the learner's ability to move from the known to the unknown, to see relationships and to make generalizations.

- Assessment procedures in communication skills should be balanced to include traditional multiple-choice testing and alternative forms such as open-ended questions, portfolios, demonstrations, debates, reports, and investigations. Assessment should be focused on improving instruction and should promote quality, depth and extensions of student work. Multiple formal and informal tools should be used for promoting, supporting, monitoring, and assessing student progress. Assessment should reflect the beliefs of the curriculum and be integrated with the instructional process.

- The foundation for learning to read begins in the home and is nurtured as the child grows and goes to school. The importance of home and school working together for the greatest positive influence in helping children become successful readers and writers should be recognized and stressed.

Practices in Teaching Communication Skills

If students are to learn how to be strategic readers and writers, they must have instructional experiences that lead them to construct understandings that are consistent with what expert readers and writers actually do.

- Teachers cannot simply follow the directions in instructional materials. They must assume regulatory control over materials rather than be controlled by them.

- Teachers have to regulate instruction by adapting prescriptions, suggestions, and commercial materials to particular students and flexible groups of students.
- Teachers will help students become responsible for their own learning.
- Teachers will encourage students to talk about their learning experiences and to work with others.
- Teachers begin the process with well-planned lessons. Teachers must summon all their flexibility, adaptability, and problem-solving skills to keep pace with the varied understandings that students bring to and take from the instructional experience.
- Teachers provide motivation, and respond in whatever ways are necessary to nurture and facilitate student learning.

We will ensure that all teachers, because they are simply the most important factor in the success or failure of the students in our schools, are able to

- Provide a rich, literate and multi-culturally sensitive environment in every classroom.
- Provide a strong supportive environment that accepts children at their developmental and achievement levels but will not lessen expectations for student learning.
- Employ a wide variety of research-based teaching approaches, methods practices, strategies and techniques at a brisk pace so that all children can succeed.
- Maximize opportunities, recognizing that with a diverse population all students do not learn in the same way and in the same amount of time.
- Provide instruction that will enable every child to master basic skills and then go as far beyond the basic level as possible.
- Establish and implement effective ways to form successful partnerships with parents in fostering children's literacy development. The staff will involve parents in facilitating the growth of their children's reading by having parents read aloud to their children, discuss stories and events, encourage reading as a free time activity and support homework.

Rubric for Effective 1-6 Communication Skills Instruction

Teacher _____ Date _____

Administrator _____ School _____

4 Excellent ..... The teacher is an expert in this area and could model for or teach others
3 Satisfactory ..... The teacher has mastered this area
2 Needs Additional Support .. The teacher is exhibiting effort but is not yet proficient in this area
1 Unsatisfactory ..... The teacher has not made an attempt to implement this area

Instructional Blocks	4	3	2	1
Teacher Read Aloud				
Read Aloud Titles indicated in Plan Book as a part of daily schedule				
Shares quality literature from a variety of genres				
Reads expressively and models thinking processes				
Occurs a minimum of 15 minutes daily				
Students are actively listening				
Self-Selected Reading Block with Teacher/Student Conferences				
Plan book indicates names of the 5 students receiving individual conferences each day				
Classroom library is displayed appropriately for the grade level				
Classroom library features a variety of levels and genres				
A Management System Incorporated in the Portfolio				
- Individual Student Conference Forms				
- John's Basic Reading Inventory				
- Computerized Point System (Accelerated Reader, Electronic Bookshelf)				

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Instructional Blocks	4	3	2	1
Teacher actively conferencing with individual students during the Block daily				
Occurs a minimum of 30 minutes daily				
All students are actively reading				
Teacher Directed Reading Block				
Plan book indicates the use of a variety of quality literature and comprehension strategies				
Plan book indicates before, during, and after reading activities each day				
All students have a copy of the text				
Background knowledge is established prior to reading				
Only key vocabulary words are taught				
Mini-Comprehension Strategy Lesson is taught				
Purpose for reading is set				
Implements flexible grouping practices during reading				
Involves skillful use of questions focusing on higher order thinking skills with students of all levels of achievement				
A variety of instructional techniques are incorporated				
Occurs a minimum of 30 minutes daily				
Supports all achievement levels while maintaining high expectations for every student				
All students are actively engaged in learning				

Instructional Blocks	4	3	2	1
Spelling/Phonics Block				
Individualized spelling list generated weekly from words used frequently in writing				
Pretest-study-posttest format used in spelling				
Word Wall is maintained using high-frequency words				
Making Words lesson occurs daily at a brisk pace following research-based format (a maximum of 8-10 minutes)				
Lesson plan indicates words to be made during Making Words and sorting activity				
Handwriting formation lesson indicated in plan book and occurs at a brisk pace				
Occurs a minimum of 20-30 minutes daily				
All students are actively engaged in learning				
Writing Block				
A teacher-led Daily Oral Language/Editing Mini-Lesson should occur 3-5 minutes daily at the beginning of the Writing Block				
Provides an opportunity for students to write in a variety of forms, for a variety of purposes, and for a variety of audiences				
Genre of writing indicated in plan book daily				
Process Writing Framework				
- Day 1 Writing Lesson always begins with a prewriting activity				
- Subsequent days begin with a Writing Strategy Mini-Lesson				

Instructional Blocks	4	3	2	1
- Leads the students through the revision and editing process with individual conferences as the students write				
- Lesson ends with a brief sharing				
Writing Portfolios include dated pieces from a variety of genre, attached to a rubric, to establish individual progress				
Student writing for publication is evident in classroom and hallway displays				
Occurs a minimum of 30 minutes daily				
Students are actively engaged in writing during the Writing Block				
Take-Home Reading				
All students are assigned Recreational Reading 15 minutes daily as a homework assignment				
A management system is established and in use for all students				
Learning Environment				
The rare use of worksheets occurs only for a specific engaged learning activity				
Desk arrangement conducive to cooperative learning activities				
Student work displayed				
Instructional time is fully utilized for active teaching/active learning				
Lesson plans are well developed and implemented using a brisk pace				

Instructional Blocks	4	3	2	1
Management system in place indicating the reading and writing achievement levels and progress for all students				
Teacher Assistants are always actively engaged with student(s) during the instructional day				
Blocks of communication skills and content areas are integrated whenever possible and appropriate				
Students are self-disciplined because they are actively engaged in learning				

Rubric for Effective Middle School Communication Skills Instruction

Teacher _____ Date _____

Administrator _____ School _____

4 Excellent ..... The teacher is an expert in this area and could model for or teach others
3 Satisfactory ..... The teacher has mastered this area
2 Needs Additional Support . The teacher is exhibiting effort but is not yet proficient in this area
1 Unsatisfactory ..... The teacher has not made an attempt to implement this area

Instructional Blocks	4	3	2	1
Teacher Read Aloud				
Read Aloud Titles indicated in Plan Book as a part of daily schedule				
Shares quality literature from a variety of genres				
Reads expressively and models thinking processes				
Occurs daily				
Students are actively listening				
Self-Selected Reading				
Plan book indicates names of the 5 students receiving individual conferences each day				
Classroom library is displayed appropriately for the grade level				
Classroom library features a variety of levels and genres				
A Management System incorporated in the Portfolio:				
- Individual Student Conference Forms				
- John's Basic Reading Inventory for levels 1 and 2				
- Computerized Point System (EIectronic Bookshelf)				

Instructional Blocks	4	3	2	1
Teacher actively conferencing with individual students during the Block daily				
Occurs a minimum of 30 minutes daily				
All students are actively reading				
Teacher Directed Reading Block				
Plan book indicates the use of a variety of quality literature and comprehension strategies				
Plan book indicates before, during, and after reading activities each day				
All students have a copy of the text				
Background knowledge is established prior to reading				
Only key vocabulary words are taught				
Mini-Comprehension Strategy Lesson is taught				
Purpose for reading is set				
Implements flexible grouping practices during reading				
Involves skillful use of questions focusing on higher order thinking skills with students of all levels of achievement				
A variety of instructional techniques are incorporated				
Occurs a minimum of 30 minutes daily				
Supports all achievement levels while maintaining high expectations for every student				
All students are actively engaged in learning				

Instructional Blocks	4	3	2	1
Writing Block				
A teacher-led Daily Oral Language/Editing Mini-Lesson should occur 3-5 minutes daily at the beginning of the Writing Block				
Provides an opportunity for students to write in a variety of forms, for a variety of purposes, and for a variety of audiences				
Genre of writing indicated in plan book daily				
Process Writing Framework:				
- Day 1 Writing Lesson always begins with a prewriting activity				
- Subsequent days begin with a Writing Strategy Mini-Lesson				
- Leads the students through the revision and editing process with individual conferences as the students write				
- Lesson ends with a brief sharing				
Writing Portfolios include dated pieces from a variety of genre, attached to a rubric, to establish individual progress				
Student writing for publication is evident in classroom and hallway displays				
Occurs a minimum of 30 minutes daily				
Students are actively engaged in writing during the Writing Block				
Take-Home Reading				
All students are assigned Recreational Reading 15 minutes daily as a homework assignment				
A management system is established and in use for all students				

Instructional Blocks	4	3	2	1
Learning Environment				
The rare use of worksheets occurs only for a specific engaged learning				
Desk arrangement conducive to cooperative learning activities				
Instructional time is fully utilized for active teaching/active learning				
Lesson plans are well developed and implemented using a brisk pace				
Management system in place indicating the reading and writing achievement levels and progress for all students				
Blocks of communication skills and content areas are integrated whenever possible and appropriate				
Students are self-disciplined because they are actively engaged in learning				

Appendix D

Evaluation Rubric for Senior Project Presentation

All Senior Project Judges must use during the oral presentations.

Student Presenter:

_____

Presentation Topic:

_____

Class:

_____

Judge's Signature:

_____

Date:

_____

Evaluation Rubric

Presentation Ratings:

1 Unsatisfactory
2 Below Average
3 Average
4 Above Average
5 Superior

Evaluation

Judge's Initials: _____

Please write comments on the back

1. Was the presenter prepared (all equipment, slide projector, music)?
   LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH

2. Did presenter have a good command of language?
   - ❖ standard grammar
     LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH
   - ❖ proper pronunciation
     LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH
   - ❖ appropriate language
     LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH
   - ❖ suitable vocabulary
     LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH

3. Did presenter appear to have a good working knowledge of his or her subject material?
   - ❖ speaks and answers questions with ease and confidence
     LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH

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- provides relevant examples
  LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH

4. Did the presentation offer new, interesting, or educational information?
   LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH

5. Did the presenter's method of delivery enhance the presentation?
   - well-organized
     LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH
   - maintained eye contact
     LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH
   - used adequate voice projection
     LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH

6. Was the presenter organized in terms of a/an:
   - introduction
     LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH
   - body
     LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH
   - conclusion
     LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH

7. Did the presenter offer quality answers posed to him or her after the presentation?
   LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH

8. Do you feel the presenter was enthusiastic about his or her subject?
   LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH

9. Do you feel the presenter put at least 15 hours of preparatory work into the presentation?
   LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH

10. Was the presenter dressed appropriately to make a formal presentation?
    LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH

11. Were visual/audio aids appropriate for the subject?
    LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH

---

12. What is the overall evaluation?
    LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH

Appendix E

K-8 Promotion-Intervention Policy

The Elizabeth City-Pasquotank Board of Education believes that in order to ensure that students have the opportunity for academic success as they move through the K-12 continuum of schooling, points must be established at which students are required to demonstrate their mastery of knowledge and its application. The Board establishes these points at the natural transitions which occur in the K-12 continuum—the end of grades 3, 6, and 8. The Board also believes that decisions with significant consequences for students, such as promotion, should never be based on a single assessment instrument given at only one point in time. The Board further charges the superintendent to develop entrance requirements for upper elementary school, middle school, and high school, and a process for their use by staff. These requirements are to determine each child's readiness to enter the next level of schooling.

Adopted: January 29, 1996

The Elizabeth City-Pasquotank Board of Education has implemented the following regulations to establish a process for making decisions concerning a student's academic readiness to move to a higher level of schooling by analyzing classroom performance as evidenced by grades, performance on paper and pencil tests, performance tasks, and teacher observation. These regulations are based upon the best assessment measures available to the district for making these decisions. These assessment measures will be reviewed annually and will be altered as more appropriate measures are developed or identified.

This process is designed to ensure that each child is objectively evaluated as an individual. It also ensures that while a student's teacher is responsible for collecting data to support whether the child is doing grade-level work, the student's teacher is not directly a part of the decision-making process. This enables teachers to support, collect evidence, and advocate for their students to reach objective performance standards, putting teachers in a true coaching role.

Entrance requirements for Grades 4, 7, and 9

Students must demonstrate their ability to do grade-level work in reading, writing, and math. This can be accomplished by scoring a III or better on the previous year's end-of-grade reading and math tests and by earning passing grades in the core courses. Students who score below Level III on the reading or math end-of-grade tests, *or students who have not earned passing grades on their coursework,* will be required to attend the School Year Plus program in order to be considered for promotion, with two exceptions:

1. Special needs and disabled students as defined in Policy IGB for whom the School Based Committee or the 504 Committee has determined that they should not be held accountable for meeting these entrance requirements.

2. Students whose end-of-grade test scores do not accurately represent their ability to do

grade-level work, as determined by a School Entrance Committee.

School Entrance Committee

The principal and/or designee shall convene a team of at least three additional members. This team must consist of at least one teacher from the receiving grade level and may not include the child's teacher. It is also strongly recommended that the team include a teacher at the child's current grade level and a teacher from the grade level below.

The Entrance Committee will automatically review students who score in the top half of the Level II range in reading or math on the end-of-grade tests. There may be a rare instance when there is reason to believe that a student scoring at Level I or the lower half of Level II is actually performing at grade level. The principal may refer those students to the School Entrance Committee for further review.

This team is responsible for reviewing additional data submitted by the classroom teacher(s) to verify whether the end-of-grade test results and classroom grades accurately reflect the child's level of academic achievement. These data will include current and previous year's test results and grades and may include a portfolio of student work assessed against grade-level expectations. Every effort will be made to keep the student's identity anonymous to ensure an objective review by the committee. The committee must determine whether the additional data confirm that the child is performing at grade level. Based on that determination, the committee will recommend either that the student be promoted to the next level of schooling or that the student must attend the School Year Plus program.

School Year Plus Program

1. The School Year Plus program will be a four-week extension of the school year for the students hoping to enter grades 4, 7, or 9.

2. Students who are referred to the School Year Plus program and who choose not to attend will have to repeat their current grade and will not be offered any special alternative program.

3. Students who attend the School Year Plus program will be administered pre- and post-tests to determine their progress. At the end of the School Year Plus program, the principal of the student's home school, in consultation with the School Year Plus staff, will make one of the following recommendations for each student:

   (a) Promotion to the next level of schooling

   (b) Conditional promotion to the next level of schooling, but required to receive additional academic support

   (c) Conditional promotion requiring assignment to a self-contained program until requirements are met

   (d) Retention at the current grade level.

4. Recommendations for special needs and disabled students as defined in Policy IGB will be made by a school-level committee and/or 504 Committee. The options available for these students are the same as those listed under 3 above. If this school level committee recommends (c) or (d) above for a special needs child, then the school-based committee must meet to make the final decision.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Students who refuse to meet the provisions of conditional promotion (recommendation b and c), as determined by the principal in consultation with

the Superintendent, will be demoted or retained in the previous grade level. Recommendation (c) may require a student to change schools. At the high school level these students may be assigned to the high school but will have to successfully complete a series of classes before beginning to earn required credits toward graduation in the core academic areas. The focus of all of these interventions is to provide students with intense academic work designed to prepare them for academic success at the next level of schooling.

The School Year Plus committee will suggest academic interventions for students receiving options (b), (c), or (d) above. The members of this committee are the summer school principal, the student's home school principal, and other educators familiar with the student's academic achievement. The committee will send the names of all students and suggested interventions to the appropriate instructional specialist. The instructional specialist is responsible for working with the appropriate teachers to develop a personal education plan for each child. This plan will outline student and parent responsibilities along with outlining instructional strategies and services designed to enable them to meet the entrance requirements.

Reporting to Parents

It is the responsibility of the school and the school system to notify the entire community of the entrance requirements for students. It is the responsibility of the teacher to closely monitor the progress of all students and to inform parents quickly when they become aware that students are not making enough progress to meet the entrance requirements for the next level of schooling by the end of the year. This concern could be based upon not only the academic achievement the teacher has observed during the current year but also previous year's performance on end-of-grade tests and other assessments, such as first and second grade assessments. Teachers must make every effort to determine when students are at risk of not meeting entrance requirements during the first semester and notify parents in writing by no later than the end of the first semester of any school year. However, if academic problems do not become apparent until after the first semester, students are not excused from meeting the entrance requirements. The ultimate responsibility for meeting the entrance requirements lies with the student.

Retention Within a Level of Schooling

Under this policy it is possible to retain a student in a grade other than 3, 6, or 8. It is advised, however, that this option be exercised only after careful examination of a student's progress, consultation with a variety of professionals, and involvement of the child's parents determine that the child would benefit from this action. This policy does require that, for each child retained in these "off-grades," a personal education plan be developed that will result in a significantly different educational experience from the previous year the child spent in that grade.

The principal is responsible for assembling a committee charged with making these decisions. It must be remembered that students retained within a level of schooling are still accountable for meeting the entrance requirements for entering the next level.

A principal must report to the superintendent at the end of each school year the names of all students retained in an off-grade and present a copy of each student's personal education plan.

Implemented: January 29, 1996

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